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THEOLOGY AS A SCIENCE.

PART II.

THE HAECKEL-LOOFS CONTROVERSY.

THEOLOGY has recently become a science. The idea of God is being purified on a philosophical basis and is fast becoming a term that will no longer give difficulty to the scientist, while the Bible is being investigated with a critical earnestness with which no other book has ever been studied. At the same time, comparative religion is giving us a better comprehension of our own faith and religious sentiments.

A century ago great disasters, such as hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, etc., gave rise to theological discussions in which the representatives of all creeds endeavored to show that there was no conflict between God's omnipotence and omniscience on the one hand and his omnibenevolence on the other. The young Goethe was still overwhelmed with the problem of the earthquake of Lisbon, as can be seen in his autobiography, and he found no satisfactory solution of it in the traditional conception of God. In our present age the latest outburst of Mount Pelée has wiped many thousands of people out of existence in the most horrible manner by suffocating them with obnoxious gases and covering them with a hail of fire. The tragedy on Martinique with a criminal as its sole survivor must have been more horrible than the catastrophe of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and worse than the earthquake of Lisbon! Yet no theological discussions were raised either in the papers or in the pulpit. No questions were asked in public as to the goodness of God. There was no excitement about it of a reli-

gious nature, save the sympathy expressed by sending help and taking care of the unfortunates that were still alive in the ruined island.

The true reason of this change must be sought in the fact that to the thinking part of mankind the problem has been solved. There are some left who do not as yet know of the new conception of God and still cling to their anthropomorphic views, but even they have their misgivings about it, and so keep quiet. Even they know that the laws of nature are irrefragable and that the old notions of providence, being no longer tenable, must be replaced by a new doctrine which holds that providence is immanent in man and that man must work out his own salvation.

There are to-day more avowed atheists than ever, and the theists are divided among themselves. Some believe in a personal God who has theoretically all the power of an autocratic ruler, but in their inmost hearts they concede that he has virtually abdicated in favor of law and so can no longer be held accountable for the various accidents that befall mortals. Others have more or less identified God and law and are thus approaching every one in his own way a scientifically tenable conception of God.

A few years ago when a storm happened to sweep over the Atlantic threatening to sink an ocean liner on which the Rev. Mr. Moody had sailed, a frivolous reporter interviewed the pious preacher, the captain, and many of the passengers as to their belief in the efficacy of the revivalist's prayer on that occasion. Moody refused to answer the question, for even with his child-like faith he saw that however he might represent his views there was little chance of making converts, and the reader could see a sort of grim humor in the report of his few remarks, which were published without invidious comments and with strict impartiality.

It is natural that in the excitement of danger people of Mr. Moody's education and disposition should implore God's mercy, but we no longer blame the captain if he has no confidence in the efficacy of prayer. Whatever the captain believes, we expect him to keep his head clear and to take the right measures to save his ship. Prayer is recommendable if it has that effect upon his mind.

If prayer were truly a reliable method of commanding the wind and the seas, navigation companies would not fail to engage men that could pray and send them out on dangerous sea voyages. But the old belief in this external and pagan conception of the efficacy of prayer has become a mere student's joke even in the good university of Oberlin, where it was said that when a certain celebrated divine prayed it sprinkled, but that when old Dr. Finney, the pious and militant theological president prayed, it *poured*.

The Pelée disaster was too terrible for frivolous comments, and so all religious discussions were hushed by the seriousness of the occasion.

Only later did the papers publish a few extravagant utterances, from which I select one which comes from the island of Martinique itself.¹ Père Marcy, the Curé of a church at Morne Rouge, denounced the inhabitants of St. Pierre for Satanism, renewing the old exploded charges of Leo Tàxill and the mythical Diana Vaughan, exclaiming with a shudder: "You have no conception of what went on in that wicked city! The Satanists and their black masses, the terrible people who worshipped the devil and made their horrible offerings to him, were not the only ones whom God punished. . . . Poor souls! They had not even time to repent of their sins."

Such views are mere survivals and are considered curiosa of antiquated bigotry and ignorance.

This change of conduct indicates a radical change in the religious attitude of the world,—a change which from the old standpoint may be characterised as a drifting toward infidelity, but which is simply the progress of a scientific conception of the world. Science has added to our knowledge and is just about to modify our religious faith. We cease to be children and approach the age of maturity. We put away childish things and grow in comprehension. There are many, perhaps, who are not yet clear as to what the new God conception is, but most of them instinc-

¹ See the St. Louis *Republic* for Sunday, July 13.

tively feel the change, and their thinking and doing is influenced by it without their knowing it.

The transformation of the old theism into the new conception of God may be fairly compared to the progress of science from alchemy to chemistry or from astrology to astronomy, and so we have proposed calling the new theology *THEONOMY*, as being a genuine science in contrast to the old theology which was based upon erratic notions, guesses, and prophetic dreams.¹

The errors of the old theology are like the heads of the hydra; when lopped off they grow again in greater numbers. Accordingly it is dangerous to fight them in open battle. There are some theologians who still believe in the old views; they distrust the progress of science and continue to hold back, but their ranks are beginning to grow thin. Others seek refuge in agnosticism. A few take their cross upon them and tell the straight truth. They may be honest, but they are not wise. So far a certain percentage of them has been tried for heresy, found guilty, and dismissed. Most of the theologians who know the truth and have found the solution, break it to the world gently, confining their efforts to the education of a new generation that will be better prepared for the problems of the present age and will no longer shrink from recognising the rights of science. These employ methods that promise success, but they have developed a new language and new modes of speech which none but the initiate understand in their full significance. They speak the truth, but they express themselves in terms which do not state but merely involve the result; or whenever results are given direct, their negative side, which discredits the old theology, is only indicated, while the positive aspect is emphasised with great energy.

Among these theologians there are plodding investigators, men of deep conviction, who have had in their own hearts to overthrow the idol which they worshipped. They know what a hard struggle it is to break away from the old traditional interpretation of religion and the child-like trust in the letter. And, now, in for-

¹ See *The Monist*, Vol. XII., No. 4, p. 561.

mulating their new views, they stop to consider the sentiments of their brethren who have not yet reached the same stage, and from sheer charity couch their statements in guarded terms and express themselves in words that will give no offence to those who are still babes and should be fed with milk only.

* * *

Charity in theological discussions is a new feature which corresponds to politeness in the realm of the other sciences. The old theology, like astrology, is distinguished by a certain vigor of expression, which rarely hesitates to show its firmness of faith in denouncing all other views as heretical.

Swearing in society is regarded as improper, but it was the style in the old theology. And the damnation of heretics is still the favorite method of settling theological disputes in the most conservative and venerable Churches. Tolstoi has had his experience of it, and Protestants even to-day are officially cursed once a year by Rome, while the Protestant confessions of faith still contain denunciations of the Pope as Antichrist.

There is no need of our denouncing, ridiculing, or vituperating the old method of settling disputes in theology, and we make reference to it without any animosity, simply characterising it as typical of a certain age of our religious development. In its time it was as natural to the Church as are childish pranks to children. The churches have outgrown it to a great extent, and will outgrow it more when, on their approach to maturity, following the prediction of St. Paul, they will put away childish things.

The fanaticism of the old Church indicates the fervor of the religious sentiment, and although the consequences are very sad when we consider the fagots of the inquisition, we need not dwell on the dark side now but may rejoice that the times have changed. We must understand, however, that the approach of science is the abolition of brutality in enforcing the truth of a proposition. The man who can prove his views by rational arguments never uses threats. Accordingly vigorous terms in upholding a proposition appear in inverse ratio to its being supported by scientific argu-

ment. Thus the more a science has reached the stage of maturity, the politer are its representatives in their discussions of mooted subjects. Mathematicians are in the habit of simply pointing out the mistakes of their colleagues. They never revile one another, for arguments are sufficient, and so they can afford to behave like gentlemen. In the measure that there are no arguments forthcoming, scientists feel constrained to make up for the deficiency by vigorous expressions denouncing as an ignoramus any one who ventures to differ from them. Thus even mathematicians, in trespassing upon the domain of metaphysics in building its metageometrical air-castles, occasionally assume the theological style. Discussions of the natural sciences, when their devotees make raids into the unknown territory of hypothesis and theory, are by no means free from personalities and invectives, still they are moderate when compared with the controversies of philosophers with their denunciations and self-glorifications. Think of the self-sufficiency of the Hegelians in Germany and witness the tirades of Schopenhauer! He had no arguments to offer; so he hurled at his *confrères* who at that time were in possession of almost all the professional chairs, the thunder of his displeasure. In the measure that philosophy becomes a science, its representatives cease to use epithets.

The climax of vigor in the assertion of a position without argument is reached in the domain of religious dogma; and we will not think the worse of the theological scholars of past ages when we consider that in their dearth of rational argument invectives and interdicts, excommunications and heresy trials, and sometimes even fire and sword, were the only weapons that could be had. If we tolerate Schopenhauer, should we not also have some consideration for the popes who are surrounded by mediæval traditions? Their thunderbolts are blunted, and the days of massacres of St. Bartholomew are past. We need not forget, but we can forgive; for we have learned to appreciate the psychology of fanaticism.

The time has come when theology itself attains to maturity. It is fast becoming a science; and in the measure that it becomes a science theologians will cease to excommunicate heretics and intro-

duce a new spirit into their discussions which is less vigorous but more polite, more considerate, more charitable.

It may appear that the abolition of vigorous terms in the domain of theology will make of it a namby-pamby science without character. But such is not the case. Argument, the new weapon, is as much more formidable than the fagot in destroying errors and in eradicating heresy, as the rifle is superior to the ancient cross-bow and the cannon to the club of a savage. It is mere euphemism when we speak of the old methods of theological discussion as "rigorous," for we are fully aware of the power that scientific argument carries. Though modern scientific discussions are couched in polite language they are incomparably more formidable than the weapons of modern warfare, and will brook no resistance. Science gives every one, every institution, every faith, every man in his station a chance to conform to its revelation, but it will slowly yet surely crush anything that persists in opposing it.

* * *

In speaking of theology as a science, we ought not to pass over in silence an incident which made a great stir in the scientific world, and which, though of a personal nature, is of general interest as characterising the period of transition—viz., the case of Loofs *versus* Haeckel. The contrast is overdrawn and the literature on the subject distorts the picture of the situation, but it will for this reason serve all the better to point out the true relation between natural science and theology.

Professor Haeckel is a naturalist, not a theologian, not a philosopher, not a historian. But being a man of deep emotions, he is enthusiastic in whatever he does, he is zealous in whatever cause he espouses, and would be called intensely religious were not his religious ideal opposed to old established religious institutions. It is but to be expected of a man of Haeckel's type that he should have artistic talents; he paints and has as keen a sense for beauty as for poetry. In natural science he rises mountain high above the average naturalist, and his peculiar field is an almost prophetic comprehension of the significance of the facts which mark the pro-

cess of life in its successive phases. It is not an accident that his nomenclature, words like "ontogenetic" and "phylogenetic" and a host of other terms, has been universally accepted by naturalists, but it must be regarded as an evidence of Haeckel's genius for finding the characteristic feature that needs determination and for describing it clearly and unmistakably by a single word. Haeckel's greatness is due to his clearness, and his fame is founded on his penetration in tracing the simple laws that rule complicated phenomena.

This sense for the recognition of the simple which Haeckel manifests, is at bottom a moral quality. He who knows Haeckel personally will gladly agree with me that he is without guile and as simple as a child. He makes no pretensions; he does not bluster or make a show; he neither seeks nor makes complications. He is direct in all he does, and in all he thinks, and in all he writes. This directness is peculiarly his when he observes nature; this directness appears in the style of his books, and this directness makes him openly blunder when he is mistaken; but this directness is simply a child's love of truth. Though Haeckel does not call himself a Christian, he is truly possessed of that child-like spirit which Christ declares is indispensable for the attainment of the Kingdom of God.

Professor Haeckel has written a book entitled *The World-Riddle*, which was a great financial success, but it became the butt of all his adversaries, theologians, Protestants and Roman Catholics, dualists of every stripe, and also philosophers and their ilk. Much of this criticism is perfectly true and may be granted in advance. Many most essential tenets in Haeckel's philosophy are thereby rendered irrelevant or antiquated, but that proves nothing against his peculiar significance in modern thought as a prophet in the field of natural science; it proves merely (as stated above) that he is not a theologian, not a historian, not a professional philosopher.

Although I consider myself a personal friend of Professor Haeckel, I by no means accept his formulation of the Monistic conception. I have had discussions with him in both *The Open Court*

and *The Monist*.¹ He made his statements and I my counter-statements, but he has always regarded the differences as trivial and purely verbal. Instead of discussing the differences, he simply wrote in a private letter: "We mean the same." Now that may be perfectly true, simply because Haeckel deems it necessary to negate certain theological claims, while I endeavor to point out the religious significance of the facts of life. He sees the latter as well as I, and I agree with his position as regards the former; but he slurs over the latter, and I deem the former antiquated. In the field of science there is nothing more important than the religious significance of scientific truth; and on the other hand, in the realm of Church life nothing is more important than the *résumé* of scientific results that affect the traditional religious belief. Hence it is natural that Professor Haeckel's religious views should have caused quite a stir in the world. He has been attacked not only by theologians, but also by philosophers. At present we are interested in the theological issue of Haeckel's position, and will therefore limit ourselves to a few comments upon the formidable onslaught on Haeckel's book *The World-Riddle*, made by Friedrich Loofs, Professor of Church History in Halle.

Professor Haeckel's *World-Riddle* is less scientific than religious, and considering his position in religion and his negative attitude in theology, the book is strong in the criticism of antiquated views and wanting in building up a new theology that would accord with natural science; and this weak point has been discovered by many theologians, philosophers, and historians, and the result has been a general attack upon our famous friend, executed with remarkable unanimity as if by general order. Here was a chance to take the scalp of a famous naturalist, and many a puny knight ventured forth to meet the giant and have a fling at him, in the hope of becoming a second David.

¹ See for instance "Monism and Mechanicalism, Comments upon Prof. Ernst Haeckel's Position," in *The Monist*, Vol. II., pp. 438-442; "Professor Haeckel's Monism," *ibid.*, Vol. II., pp. 598-600; "Professor Haeckel's Panpsychism," *ibid.*, Vol. III., pp. 234-242; "Professor Haeckel's Monism and the Ideas of God and Immortality," in *The Open Court*, Vol. V., No. 212, pp. 2957-2958.

Professor Loofs is one of these would-be Davids. He put on the royal armor of science, but it proved too heavy for him, so he preferred the sling of abuse and attacked Haeckel in the vigorous style of ancient theology by calling him names.

Now, we know little about Professor Loofs's accomplishments. Upon the whole, he seems to be a fairly well-established representative of modern theology, though he is not a star of the first magnitude. He is a scholar and is apparently imbued with the spirit of science. But he does not conceal the irritation he feels when contemplating the recognition which is accorded to the natural sciences, and he chafes at the thought that the public at large as yet know nothing of the latest developments in theology. Even men of fame know nothing of it, and the time seems to have come for a doughty knight of divinity to have a tilt with one of the naturalists and prove the valor of the theologian in the domain of science.

Now, Haeckel claims that the miracle of the immaculate conception is untenable, and venturing in a footnote upon the historical field incidentally makes the mistake of treating an old Jewish insinuation, that Jesus was of illegitimate birth, as a historical document of credence. Professor Loofs did not let the opportunity slip. He addressed Haeckel in a private letter first sarcastically but politely, then in a public letter in most insulting terms, with the outspoken hope that Haeckel would sue him for abuse. A law suit of that kind would have engaged public attention, and Professor Loofs's name would have appeared in all newspapers. Haeckel, however, did not gratify Loofs's wish but referred him to his authority, Saladin.

Now, Saladin is the pseudonym of W. Stuart Ross, a Scotchman, who began his career as a student of theology but turned unbeliever and is now editor of the *Agnostic Journal* and one of the most noted freethinkers in London. Haeckel, who is quite ingenuous in matters theological, spoke of Saladin as "a prominent English theologian," and so furnished more grist for the mill of Professor Loofs.

Professor Haeckel can scarcely have read Loofs's expositions, for he (not being in the habit of writing between the lines) is still

less accustomed to read between the lines, yet this is an art which has attained a high development in modern theology. Probably Haeckel did not even read Professor Loofs's letters, and so, assuming that his critic believes in the supernatural conception, refuses to enter into a controversy with him. Here Loofs finds another weak point. He accuses Haeckel of dishonesty, for Loofs insists that Haeckel's negligence is intentional.

In our opinion there is no question but Haeckel's oversight is due to carelessness, and not to dishonest misinterpretation, for what a chance did Haeckel miss in not requesting Loofs to state frankly and in unequivocal terms whether or not he believed in the natural birth of Jesus!

Professor Loofs (another Herostratus) was bent on acquiring notoriety, and so he took opportunity by the forelock and again rushed into print, this time in a pamphlet under the title *Anti-Haeckel*, in which he triumphantly displayed the scalp of the famous naturalist.

The situation is humorous and would afford good material for the cartoonists of *Puck* and *Life*; but we will forbear entering into details and discuss only such points as possess a significance beyond themselves.

The soil on which our David met his giant adversary (viz., ancient Jewish traditions) is slippery ground and all but inaccessible to common mortals. Its topography is known only to a few rabbis of Poland and Germany who have been reared from babyhood on the milk of Talmudic lore. It is a matter of course that Professor Haeckel is not at home here and to take him to task for being ignorant as to the literary significance of a reference to the *Sepher Toldoth* is as much justified as if Haeckel found a flaw in Professor Loofs's knowledge of some obscure detail of the natural sciences, say on the subject of parthenogenesis which in certain families of the lower species is not a miracle but an established fact. But unfortunately Professor Loofs, in spite of his theological education, failed to prove his point and gave evidence only of his ignorance in this special branch of learning. Dr. Erich Bischoff, the editor of the *Christliche Welt* in which Loofs published his open letter to

Haeckel, proves that Loofs's counter-proposition is untenable and that even his statement concerning the synodicon as to the established canonicity of the four gospels at the Council of Nicæa cannot be relied upon. But that is incidental and we do not intend to enter into details, though it ought to have taught Loofs charity toward others.

One point is of special importance; it is this: On close inspection it appears that both parties agree much better than Professor Haeckel is aware of. Professor Loofs seems to believe as little as Professor Haeckel in the virgin birth of Jesus, but while the latter makes his statement in the directest possible way, saying that he being a natural philosopher does not believe in miracles, Professor Loofs is more circumspect and makes no definite statement. The conclusion at which he arrives is written between the lines.

Professor Loofs insists that he attacks Haeckel on account of "his vigorous hatred of Christianity and his lack of appreciation of Christian faith and morality;" he speaks of his "arrogant ignorance" (*anmassliche Unwissenheit*), but expressly denies that the historicity of Christ's virgin birth is the issue of the controversy. As to the latter, Loofs points out that "there was an ancient tradition in Jewish-Christian circles according to which Jesus was regarded as the son of Joseph"; . . . and "it is not an arbitrary proposition to represent Math. i. 18 ff. and Luke ii. 1 ff. as belonging to later strata of Biblical tradition. . . ." However, dogmatic arguments in favor of the Parthenogenesis cannot stand. . . . "There is no reason to understand why a natural birth in the conception should be different from a natural growth," etc., etc.

I have no inclination to argue with Professor Loofs; he might write me a letter similar to that which he wrote to Haeckel. So simply state a few of his arguments to show the logic of his argumentation. Dr. Bischoff, who seems to possess the tact to find the proper word at the right time, adds that Mary's psychical virginity is more significant by far than the miracle of a supernatural conception. But we might suggest to Professor Loofs that the literary arguments of the Church historian which are supererogatory

to scientists like Haeckel, have no weight with people who accept miracles, and must appear flimsy to a staunch believer.

* * *

The case Loofs *versus* Haeckel is a spectacular side-show, which is as interesting as a burlesque written in travesty of a serious drama. While it discloses foibles in both combatants, it indicates that the times have changed. There is now a theology that has become a science, and natural science has become one of her most powerful allies.

We know now that all truth is divine and God reveals himself in natural science as well as in history. The most significant lessons for religious purposes are the facts of man's life; his sorrows and temptations, his bereavements and his final destiny in death. His spiritual growth is recorded in the development of the race and has found classical expression in the sacred books of the several religions. The duty devolves upon us to study these documents of man's religious life, to collate and compare them and thus understand their significance in the religious evolution of mankind. A literal acceptance of the Bible and of the dogmas in the symbolical books is as pagan as was the ancient belief in Greek mythology. A genuine Christianity and a scientific theology (*viz.*, theonomy) became possible only through the overthrow of the paganism that still clings to the traditional interpretation of religion. So far the new theology has plodded on in modest obscurity, but the time has come when what scholars whisper into each other's ears will be preached from the housetops. It is an open secret, generally recognised though little talked about, that the new theology exists and is in a quiet way working out a most important reformation in our religious life, and this reformation is mainly concerned with the intellectual side of religion and insists on scientific honesty.

Do not blame the new theology for its reluctance in speaking out boldly and bluntly, for there are many things that, though true, would, under certain conditions, if uttered brusquely, be positively injurious, and indeed, if expressed without propriety, even wrong and false. We cannot recommend Professor Loofs's methods. In his theological articles he uses the language of the new theology,

speaking by indirection, but in his controversy he follows the vigorous methods of the old theology, heaping abuse upon the head of his adversary. While his example ought not to be followed, we appreciate highly the tact of the genuine theologian.

There is no need of either letting truth ostentatiously go naked or of hiding her form in the drapery of hypocrisy. Discretion is her most becoming garment.

If Professor Haeckel had known that his theological adversary absolutely disclaimed defending the supernatural birth of Jesus, nay more, that on close inspection he was even guilty of not believing it himself, and that his notion of miracles was diluted by philosophical considerations, he would have been bewildered, for he takes the supernatural birth of Jesus to be the issue of the controversy. If Haeckel had been aware of the fact that Professor Loofs censured him merely for a lack of judgment as to the historical unreliability of certain references in the Talmud, made in an incidental footnote, he would have exclaimed: *Pourquoi tant de bruit pour une omelette?*

EDITOR.